
Subtle othering in EFL group work**Susana Widyastuti***

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ABSTRACT

Group work in language learning has been praised for its success stories in encouraging collaboration and interaction among learners. However, scant attention has been given to exploring how students perceive the Other and how group work can be a platform for identity construction. In the context of EFL classrooms, this study investigates students' preference regarding group work and peers, which is reflected through their perception and behaviors towards different attributes constructing the Self and the Other. The data was collected through questionnaires involving 241 English Literature students. The results show that, first, despite the challenges of embracing differences among the group members, group work is still preferred over individual work for the advantages, productivity, and enjoyment it offers. Second, while friendship is seen as a crucial contributor to successful group work, students also choose peers based on personalities and skills in English, teamwork, communication, leadership, and technology. This preference motivates othering, whereby the good characteristics of the preferred Self are contrasted with the bad qualities of the dis-preferred Other. This study has proven that subtle othering prevails in group work practices in the academic environment. Perceptions of the Other have influenced students' behaviors, roles, and abilities to engage and succeed in group work. Pedagogical attempts should be devoted to creating a more accommodative environment for language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Group work has been one of the successful approaches to developing collaborative and cooperative learning across disciplines in the history of educational innovation (Davidson & Major, 2014; Davidson, Major, & Michaelsen, 2014; Slavin, 1996). In language classes, in particular, it is a commonly used pedagogical tool to encourage interaction and participation among learners (Hendry et al., 2005). It is conceptualized as "a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language" (Brown, 2001, p. 177). A body of literature (see Cooper & Robinson, 2014; Davidson & Major, 2014; Davidson et al., 2014 for a comprehensive review) has shown that, in many ways, group work is better than the pure lecture method and is considered a fruitful teaching technique, both for teachers in transferring knowledge and for students in performing better in the classroom. Teachers may use various small group techniques, yet they share common goals in motivating students to engage more comfortably in the learning process, enhance their critical thinking skills, and share and construct new understanding and knowledge (Almond, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2013).

However, all these benefits can only be gained when students agree to exercise the main agenda of group work, that is collaboration (Davidson et al., 2014), through which they not only complete the assigned tasks but also socialize and learn from each other while developing their language and communication skills at the same time (Arumugam, Rafik-Galea, De Mello, & Dass, 2013). In practice, unexpected outcomes may occur, such as when students do not follow teachers' instructions and surprisingly behave differently when working in groups (Chen & Hird, 2006). Some students may also

find group work not beneficial, does not improve students' performance (Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014), and creates stress due to various socio-psychological reasons. On the other hand, teachers sometimes lose track of what working in groups means, particularly because of the overuse of group work and the advantages it offers without taking care of what happens with the participants.

In English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, one characteristic of group work is high interaction between learners, which is intended to advance language, particularly speaking, skills (Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997; Hendry et al., 2005; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). This interaction makes EFL group work a learning activity that encourages students to deal with all sorts of peers. Thus, encounters with the Other are unavoidable. During the learning process, different types of the Other interact with each other to make a meaningful learning experience. While group work is intended to create a more positive and engaging interaction, students may face anxiety and issues about peers with different abilities, learning styles, or cultures (Arumugam et al., 2013). Given this context, this study seeks to reveal how the learning process in group work may emanate the construction of otherness. Specifically, it is interested in revealing how particular forms of otherness may emerge and characterize pluralism in an academic context which is institutionally designed as a site that welcomes and values plurality.

Nevertheless, recent studies have mostly been dedicated to foregrounding group work's positive aspects and benefits (see Davidson & Major, 2014; Davidson et al., 2014). There are still unexplored questions, such as how group work operates and how students behave in groups, particularly in EFL classrooms, where people from different language abilities and backgrounds encounter. The interaction among different types of learners and teachers can pose crucial events (e.g. Creutz-Kömpfi, 2008; Palfreyman, 2005; Zabus, 1990) when othering can easily permeate the language classroom (Porto, 2009). The events are characterized by a high contestation of power and identity among young people. In this contestation, learners seek to collaborate and, at the same time, negotiate their identity and culture as part of their effort to advance their knowledge (see Byram, 2006, 2021). In this situation, students develop their critical awareness of the identity of their own and the Other, which then shapes what it is to be in the classroom in today's context, i.e., "classroom not only . . . as a window to the world but also as a space that provides opportunities for human growth" (Dasli, 2011, p. 15).

To sum up, this paper investigates students' preference regarding group work and peers and how it may reflect the practices of othering in the classroom. It seeks to reflect upon whether and how 'othering' permeates educational sites, particularly in the EFL context? Do we have enough space in our learning system to promote and celebrate various cultures in the classroom? In a nutshell, the study seeks to investigate further the dimensions that may not appear in people's responses when asked, "Do you think students try to avoid certain students because they are different?" In other words, it seeks to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of the Other and to understand how such perception shapes the teaching and learning process within the EFL context. I asked some students that simple question as part of my pre-research process to gain insights into people's perception of the Other in the classroom and to understand whether the issue is relevant in the particular site in the current context, the 21st-century millennials. It can be easily guessed that the answer is 'No'. They believe in the university values that highly acknowledge cultural diversity and condemn discrimination.

Othering: From history to EFL classroom interaction

"Othering" has been defined as the practice of how people "over-generalize, stereotype, and reduce others to something different or less than they are" (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010). Originally derived from Said's concept (1978), it is usually used to refer to the practices when the minority group is culturally deemed different and seen as a danger to the rest of society and to reinforce the difference for justifying the political dominance over the so-called alien Other. The practice is particularly prevalent in an environment where people from different groups interact and naturally put themselves into two binary groups: the Self and the Other. This inter-group comparison (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is manifested through the way people position the Self (I or We) as powerful, positive, and superior and the Other (You or Them) as powerless, negative, and inferior (Bourdieu & Polkinghorn, 2008; Holliday, 2011; Holliday et al., 2010; Riggins, 2007). In a nutshell, people affirm the good identity of the Self by contrasting it with the negative characteristics of outsiders and by claiming one's own culture as being normal and acceptable according to its norms and seeing those of others as abnormal (Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1997).

Within various practices of othering, particularly those that are politically motivated, othering is rooted in the so-called difference, signifies unequal power relations between two groups, and causes various forms of injustice and other social problems (see Riggins, 2007). Various instances of othering due to ethnicity, social status, nationality, and religion or culture (e.g. Chua, 2004; Hoon, 2006; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Varjonen, Arnold, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013; Wodak, 1997) are clear as the history has shown in the relations between the majority and the minority groups like the White and the Black, men, and women, the Western and the Asian, the Moslem and Non-Moslem, and the indigenous and non-indigenous. They also exemplify how the hegemony of the majority are accepted and (once) enacted for some political reasons and, ironically, practiced in people's everyday life intentionally or unintentionally (see Reyes, 2011; van Dijk, 1997). In the Indonesian context, Chinese Indonesians, or the so-called *Tionghoa* recently and *Cina* in the past, have long been an integral part of Indonesia and historically have contributed significantly to the country's economic development. However, they have been othered due to their cultural roots and have to go through various instances of othering, from blatant to subtle ones, until they are gradually accepted as Indonesians (Dawis, 2009; Hoon, 2006; Tan, 2005).

How can othering now permeate the classroom? Do aspects like culture, ethnicity, religion, or social status matter in shaping student-teacher interaction, particularly in the teaching of EFL? Are there any power relations among academic members? When talking about teacher-student interaction, power relation is indeed apparent as they are socially and institutionally placed in superior-inferior positions in the social order. This kind of power relation is specifically true in the Indonesian context, where, for instance, respecting teachers is one of the norms for maintaining a harmonious learning environment. Relationships among students can be assumed more neutral as they are of the same position regardless of their background. Taking the context of the Spanish classroom, Morena-Lopez (2004) claims that, as a mirror of the broader social system, the classroom becomes a natural place where academic members develop relationships and possibly dominance and othering.

In the teaching of EFL, 'the language factor' can constitute a key dimension of the creation of otherness because the language taught and used in the classroom can reflect students' values, meanings, and behaviors (Byram & Guilherme, 2000). This notion of otherness in the EFL context can be an obstacle in intergroup relations, and the construction of personal or group identity often creates wrong pictures of the Other. Palfreyman (2005) elaborates on how othering is practiced in English classrooms. It is evident that during the learning process, students are largely exposed to the English language and culture in various forms and, at the same time, reshape their identity as language learners, which can be seen through their social and academic attitudes and behaviors. It is thus crucial to consider any possible emerging causes of othering in the EFL context other than the mainstream dimensions of plurality

METHOD

The setting of the study is an English Literature study program in a reputable state university. English is the primary language of instruction. Through a tight enrollment process, the university is responsible for ensuring that potential students have sufficient English competence. Admission adheres to the regulations enacted by the university and government, which give opportunities for potential students from diverse economic and socio-cultural backgrounds.

The participants were 241 students, and the data was collected through questionnaires. The participants were my students and attended other courses during the semester. Consent was obtained from the participants before the data collection. At the session, when the survey was about to be administered, they confirmed their participation and gave their consent for me to use, analyze, and publish their responses. The participants were made pseudonyms, and their narratives were presented in this paper as is without any grammatical correction.

Questionnaires were used to gather background information about language learning experiences and preferences when working with other students and their perceptions of each other. A pilot study was conducted before the survey administration to gain validity for each question. The questionnaire consisted of questions on a five-scalar scale (14 questions) and open-ended responses (2 questions). The five-scale measure was used to allow participants to explicitly respond to the statement based on their disagreement or agreement level, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with numeric values from 1 to 5. The open-ended questions were useful for gaining more insights into how the respondent feels and how they personally perceive the issues in question. The questions were made more personal to gain

more authentic responses that represent their actual situation and to avoid normative answers which are sometimes biased because respondents were trying to provide good answers. They aimed to obtain personal narratives of experience when interacting with other students during the learning process.

This study adopts qualitatively driven mixed-methods since it focuses on in-depth reasoning and quality of results. The use of numbers in this qualitative research is less significant than the narrative explanation, but it is needed to give a more precise understanding, thereby increasing the meaning of the findings (Chivanga, 2016; Maxwell, 2010). Quantitative analysis in this research is also necessary to reduce the degree of subjectivity. It has been generally understood that in qualitative research methodology, a researcher sees the social world from a certain point of view that may differ from other researchers. The statistical data from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics, a simple SPSS analysis, to find the mean of students' responses for each item. The average is needed to understand the overall tendency of the given sample population. The narratives were examined manually through an in-depth analysis to reveal how othering phenomena take place in the context of EFL classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Students' responses to the survey about group work have yielded rich insights into two major issues that become the focus of this paper, i.e. (1) students' perception of group work and (2) their preference on whom they want to work with (henceforth, the Self or ingroup) and not to work with (henceforth, the Other or outgroup). Although the open-ended questions only consist of two questions about their experiences in group work, the narratives are rich in information and complement the points set up in the scalar scale questions. It is surprising to find that the narratives are in some ways unpredictable, for while narrating their stories, they are constructing their perception and drawing various discourses which shape the identity of the preferred 'us' (me and other good students) and the dis-preferred 'they' (not-so-good students). These insights have revealed instances and processes of othering, whereby students construct a shared representation of the Self – the Other in the context of the EFL classroom.

Table 1. Students' preference toward group work and peers

No	Items	Mean
1.	I prefer group work to individual work	2.98
2.	I found group work beneficial	3.56
3.	By working in a group, I can produce better work than on my own	3.27
4.	I enjoy working in a group	3.34
5.	I like working with new people in my group	3.17
6.	I prefer to have my group members assigned by the lecturer (as opposed to I select my own group members)	2.92
7.	I think working with people from different backgrounds can enhance group work	3.6
8.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different gender	3.38
9.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different ethnicity	3.71
10.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different religion	3.73
11.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different social class	3.68
12.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different level of academic competence	3.43
13.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different level of English proficiency	3.5
14.	I feel comfortable when working with someone of a different level of teamwork skills	3.22

Table 1 shows that, first, although the mean of those preferring group work is only 2.98, a big number of students agree that group work is beneficial (mean 3.56), can help them produce better work (mean 3.27), and give them opportunities to meet new people (mean 3.17). Their responses also reveal that some tend to favor group work due to their good experience of sharing and communicating ideas and knowledge to help each other learn better. Students also reported that working in a group environment has helped develop their collaborative skills in some ways.

Extract 1 Mira

My group helped each other and shared knowledge. Sometimes we went out together just for fun. But I like it when I can ask them when I don't know something.

Looking at the mean (2.98), we cannot disparage the number of those preferring individual work. Aside from the positive perspective, some students experience a certain level of frustration (e.g. Extract 2). This mainly occurs when group work goals are not achieved as expected, when there is no equal share of responsibility, and when they have to work with peers who are not cooperative. Further, Extracts 2 and 3 reveal how the essence of working together is not achieved because in the end the assignment is done individually but submitted together as if they work in a group.

Extract 2 Dewi

It can be a stressed out when the group members don't show up or they don't participate much or even just don't work, and you have to do all by yourself and at the end of the day you get really stressed out because you have a lot of work that you need to do yourself

Extract 3 Seno

Yes, I'm not comfortable when I have to work in a group which I don't know the person yet or rarely talk to. Since, we are not close and never talking, we ended up doing the work individually.

While they enjoy working in groups (mean 3.37), the lower mean of random group formation (2.92) can lead us to question the reasons behind this. The extracts that follow may tell us instances of how group work can be ineffective due to various problems, which can lead us to the answers to my second question, students' preference for peers. The interview suggests that some students hesitate in choosing whom they want to work with because of some degree of social or psychological barriers in self-picking group members, particularly when they are not personally close and when students encounter problems with interpersonal relations (Extract 4). As a result, these marginalized students have no free choice to join groups and end up with a group they do not want to.

Extract 4 Felix

Sometimes, when the teacher tells us to choose the group members by ourselves, I cannot even choose any of them because I do not think I have close friends, so I am usually chosen by them or maybe I join the group whose member hasn't full yet.

A big portion of narrative data show how closeness and friendship become important considerations for choosing peers and are thus key for successful group work (Extracts 5 and 6). They found it easier to create a better mood, communicate their ideas, and complete the assignment when working with friends. They share a common goal of commitment to achieving successful results for the group, enabling them to work in relative harmony together despite their differences. Their friendship is formed based on some commonalities between students. Their social time creates the same 'frequency' and produces social contexts that facilitate conceptual understanding through group discussion. It has a significantly positive effect on the quality of their work and a sense of contentment within their learning (Senior & Howard, 2014).

Extract 5 Johan

The people that I am close with, or the one that we usually hang out together, because usually we are doing the work in our own pace and easy to get contact. We usually went together and do our work by exchanging our ideas until we understand the materials. However, it is not boring because we can do it while doing other things or take some breaks at a time.

Extract 6 Wini

I prefer to work together with people who are in the same frequency with me. I like working with my close friends because we share the same braincells. We know already the pattern. Sometimes I want to explore and dig into experiences I have not been through

However, in many cases, this closeness creates otherness and alienation simultaneously, particularly for those who feel excluded and not part of the friendship circle. This situation can leave frustration for the Other for not being accepted and appreciated (Extract 7) and results in individual instead of group work. This negative effect of friendship in group work has not been acknowledged in

the existing literature. Respondent in Extract 4 also highlights that his membership in the group is not fully wanted by the other members. They just have no other options than recruiting her to complete the minimum number of group members.

Extract 7 Fitri

Yes, I feel left out because others are from the same group that like to hang out together while I'm in a different friend circle so it's hard to blend. There's also time they didn't take my opinion into consideration

While it is also believed that group work can create a more engaging learning atmosphere and give students opportunities to work with the Other (Davidson et al., 2014; Hendry et al., 2005), the survey and interview have given insights into the preference and alienation phenomena which are largely shaped by students' perception about the Other. The survey indicates various means of preference based on gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, academic competence, English proficiency, and teamwork skills. It is worth noting that teamwork skills hold the lowest mean (3.22), implying that, compared to other items, this aspect is the most problematic issue in having good teamwork. Among the seven criteria of difference that mark students' preference regarding group members asked in the survey, three of them are of the least mean and worth highlighting, i.e., academic competence (mean 3.43), gender (mean 3.38), and teamwork skills (mean 3.22). The report that, for some students, gender is part of their preference is in line with the notion that while groups in higher education are often composed without regard to students' gender, composing groups based on gender may have significant effects on group effectiveness (Hendry et al., 2005). The open-ended comments suggest that gender is more about enjoyment and convenience in doing group work. Meanwhile, academic competence and teamwork skills are considered crucial for achieving the group's goal.

Table 2. Academic qualities of preferred and dis-preferred peers

No	Features	Preferred peers	Dis-preferred peers
1	Personalities	responsible, diligent, punctual, open-minded, honest	irresponsible, lazy, procrastinating, plagiarist, close-minded,
2	Communication	fast responding, easy to contact	slow responding, difficult to contact
3	Teamwork	able to work promptly, have good time management, contribute significantly to the group, cooperative	unable to work on time, bad time management, less or no contribution to the group, not cooperative
4	Leadership	good leadership	bad leadership
5	Technology	good mastery of technology, active on social media	less technology skills, not active on social media
6	English skills	Good English and public speaking skills	<i>not specified</i>

The Self and the Other are attributed with different sets of academic orientation which refers to the combination of personal skills, attitudes, and values towards group work specifically and life in general (see Table 2). A range of academic habits or qualities that emerge from the narratives can describe that their class is composed of heterogeneous individuals and that they have been working with all sorts of peers.

Extract 8 Medi

I want them to be in my group because they are active in expressing their opinion. They know what they have to do. They are also responsible and supportive people. One of the people I want to make a groupmate with has good public speaking skills. It is beneficial when we present the material. Another friend that I choose is the one who has high creativity. It is also very useful. Basically, I choose people who I comfortable with and who can work together in a group.

Extract 9 Resi

I prefer not to work with slacker or close-minded people. Sometimes I procrastinate but it doesn't mean that I love submitting my assignment overdue deadline, and it is so hard to brainstorm and work with close-minded people because they'd think what they know is what is right.

Extract 10 Dian

One day I got a group consisting of 4 or 5 members. One of them is a person who is never online on social media. She just online at time when we start the class. So, it's really difficult to communicate with her. I think I got many experiences for not being comfortable in a group when doing assignment

Preferred peers are described with good qualities such as fun, skillful, fast responding, punctual, and diligent. Students suggest that it is troublesome when working with the opposite group, those who are irresponsible, lazy, difficult to contact, less attentive, careless, and challenging to reach (e.g. extracts 8 - 10). Another contributor to ineffective group work is the lack of communication skills, which is relevant in the COVID-19 pandemic (see Extract 10), when online communication is highly needed. Some students are inclined to good academic behaviors and, therefore more likely to initiate and complete group work than those lacking such academic traits. When it comes to group work and when not managed properly, this different orientation may cause frustration both for the superior Self and the marginal Other.

Discussion

This section offers a profound exploration of the research results to conceptualize and give a comprehensive picture of group work practices in an EFL classroom context. Students' perceptions and attitudes towards group work and peers can be understood within at least two points, i.e., that the academic world should be aware of new forms of othering and that educators should make necessary efforts to reduce othering by raising students' critical awareness towards difference and developing appropriate pedagogical tools in the EFL classroom.

The new practice of othering in the EFL classroom

This study has revealed the extent to which group work can improve student achievement (see Davidson & Major, 2014), and the results have shown that two conditions proposed by Slavin (1983) are essential for successful group learning, namely group goals/rewards and individual accountability. Sharing goals and responsibility motivates "equal participation" (Kagan & Kagan, 2009) in a mutually helpful manner, academically and socially. In a nutshell, the success of group work can be achieved through the combination of active academic and social learning (Davidson & Major, 2014).

In terms of social learning, their behaviors during group work also demonstrate the aspects that have in some ways shaped the classroom socio-psychological structure comprising the preferred or good us (whom I want to be with or which group I (should) belong to) and the dis-preferred or not-so-good them (whom I do not want to be with or the group I (should) not belong to). This binary of ingroup and outgroup is socially and academically constructed on the perceptions and reflected through the behaviors. This can then lead to the perpetuation of group stereotyping and othering, as suggested by Holliday, that othering "can be simply seen as looking at someone as alien or different to us" (Holliday et al., 2010, p. 2 with emphasis). This is to say that the classroom is not fully discrimination-free: subtle forms of othering are real and practiced intentionally and unintentionally through the choices they make in group work. Although we cannot generalize these findings as these are tendencies, we must recognize them as they give us insights into the life portrait of interpersonal or intergroup relations in the academic world.

Here, the learning process has also become a platform for identity construction (Porto, 2009). The negative, strange, and uncommon identities of dis-preferred students are largely contrasted with the preferred students' positive, good, and normal values and attributes. In some cases, the othering is blatant, and their bad attributes are used to justify exclusion because the Self thinks that the presence of the Other can ruin group work (extract 11). This stereotype about the Other is shared and the result is clear: the feelings of being excluded (see also extract 7).

Extract 11 Dianti

There are some students who have a **bad reputation** for doing group assignments. From my experience is Nina. She's the one who didn't contribute to discussing the presentation's material. The other students that I know from my friends who have been in a group with these students are Retno and Ratna. They are **well-known** for being uncooperative in doing group assignments.

Further, while consideration of mainstream issues like ethnicity, religion, and social class are not prevalent, participants draw on new and broader discourses about learning and personal behaviors. Other than friendship and personalities, they particularly emphasize their preference for having group members who have good conduct in the English language, teamwork, communication, leadership, and technology. These areas construct the identity of preferred students in the 21st-century context of EFL classrooms and demonstrate the conceptualization of difference by young people in academic and modern contexts. This conceptualization distinguishes the culture from the classic definition suggested by most literature, which refers to a certain group's long-perceived beliefs and customs. Rooted in the different conceptualization of culture, the discourses of othering in the modern context are not simply products of ethnocentrism. This academic culture is shaped in and through everyday interaction and constructed in response to today's context of the life of young learners. The century is characterized by young people with a new definition of pluralism, the pluralism that we all must be aware of, and places classrooms as "culturally sensitive places to learn" (Porto, 2009, p. 47). These classrooms give opportunities for positively transforming individuals' thinking and actions. Having said that, the need to foster critical cultural awareness and appreciation towards the Other has become crucial to developing academic competence (Byram, 2006, 2021).

The pedagogy for countering othering in the EFL classroom

What is more important is that students' personal and learning behaviors about the Other shape their decisions about roles, attitudes, and approaches in the group learning process. They think group work can be more productive when, for instance, they work with close friends and procrastinators do not join their group. The data did not significantly show students' efforts to accommodate and help the marginalized. If they eventually accomplish the assigned task, it is merely because they must. Here is the gap that should be evaluated and critically viewed as a threat and danger in group work if not tackled properly. This is where educators can play their role as a motivator and planner in the learning process.

From a socio-psychological point of view, during the learning process, young people often try to create opposing identities to resist the inferior status created by others and to find alternative ways to look better. While constructing their identities, they exclude the Other simply because they are not friends and do not match their list of preferences. It also ultimately demands negotiating and developing new and hybrid educational practices that enable them to embrace those different identities. Holliday (1999) suggests that problems associated with othering can be addressed by adopting "alternative ways of looking . . . at the people we work with in innovation scenarios—in their own terms rather than ours" (pp. 30–31).

What should concern educators is that this othering in academic discourses has a somewhat negative tone that may affect students' ability to interact, engage, and participate fully in the learning process. The processes of identity construction and othering in the classroom should be considered for directing educators on improving group work management and eventually creating a more difference-friendly classroom. In studies of cooperative learning groups in classroom contexts, Duek (2000) suggests that learning is enhanced when groups are formed of students with different levels of ability and personal characteristics. The group learning process has played a role in how individuals make sense of the identities and roles of the group members. The inclusion of socio-cultural context and the urgency to integrate the understanding of culture in the EFL teaching practice is thus unavoidably prudent (Coleman, 1996; Holliday, 1994; Norton, 2000; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002). Knowing the local context of the classroom, i.e., the students and their background, is prudent while seeking to ingrain cultural awareness and diversity into the curriculum. This curriculum is expected to encourage all students' cultural awareness, enhance each student's sense of identity, and foster inclusion in the classroom community.

When it comes to teaching practice, as mediators, educators need to understand how young people perceive themselves and the Other and to what extent such perception may influence their interaction and their achievement during the learning process. This understanding can in turn help them incorporate the appropriate teaching approach that is suitable for learners not only with complex cultures but also with various language backgrounds and abilities. Educators should be aware of at least three challenges to maintain group work as a positive, engaging, and accommodating learning experience for all types of students. First, group formation might need to consider students' recommendations and preferences. Teachers can combine random and self-selection methods and consider the aspects that may influence

effectiveness and enjoyment in working in a group. It may facilitate learning through knowledge acquisition in groups as well as for developing some generic graduate attributes, like the ability to work as a team. Second, developing pedagogical tools that accommodate differences and expand individual understanding of the Self and the Other is necessary. When it comes to EFL classrooms, students' performance in the classroom is much determined by the combination of their language competence over their general academic competence. The results also mention that their communication and social competence are crucial to a successful learning experience. Third, the discourses of othering in the study program under investigation appear to be based on student's ability to work in groups and in completing tasks in a team. In terms of practice, Canagarajah (2002) suggests that teachers should base pedagogical practices on understanding the culture of learning in the community where they are teaching. An exploratory and reflective approach to the teaching context can be incorporated by giving opportunities to the individual teacher to respond to students' preferred group learning strategies.

In a nutshell, the ultimate goal of more accommodative pedagogical tools in group work is to minimize gaps among students by motivating 'the less Other' without underestimating 'the more Self'. The urgency of appropriate pedagogical tools is also highlighted by Houghton, Furumura, Lebedko, & Li (2014, p. 213) by suggesting that such tools can be valuable instruments to improve students' engagement and promote cultural "conscientization, problem-posing, dialogue, and reflection" Handling possible emerging (negative) factors raised by issues of difference in the classroom through the use of appropriate teaching method can help students and teachers reflect and explore the real world which is so complex through the learning experience in such plural academic environment. The required good qualities of students emerging in the narrative can also give ideas for educators to help students with different backgrounds and needs succeed and thrive in an exponentially diverse world. While it is true that intergroup encounter is unavoidable, the educational values of equality promoted intensively through learning practices should make the classroom environment politics-free and wide open for people from different background. Diversity and challenges in and out of the classroom will continue to grow, so it is crucial to prepare students to adapt to an evolving world and embrace difference and change.

CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated that group work is preferred and beneficial irrespective of the challenges and complexities. To succeed in group work, students must be able to cope with people with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and behaviors. When not perceived and responded to positively, differences in group work may cause othering (students see and treat the Other negatively) and alienation (the marginalized Other feels excluded and not wanted during the learning process). The research has also highlighted that the seed of othering is no longer ethnocentrism. It is more about the learning behaviors and cultures of 21st-century young people, i.e., personalities, communication, leadership, teamwork, and technology. The results then prove that othering permeates an academic environment where difference should be highly valued, accepted, and perceived as an asset instead of a weakness.

The paper can be a reminder for the academic world about the existence of othering in language classrooms. It has thus become teachers' responsibility to learn their students' specific characteristics so they can develop appropriate and authentic pedagogies for helping them. Classrooms, as reflections of society, are the place for learning and teaching for advancing understandings and critical awareness for the production and reproduction of othering and the need for a more accommodative learning environment in the current context. Therefore, further research should be dedicated more to the psychological issues of perception and behaviors by involving all academic members and relevant parties, i.e., administrators, teachers, parents, and authorities.

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